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Unfair Treatment Of Zonians Cited

Editor, The Statesman:

Abraham Lincoln said, "Let the people know the truth and the country is safe." Unfortunately, the whole truth is not coming from the UPI and AP wire services; neither is it coming from many of the editorials and national magazine articles. I refer specifically to those which accuse the U. S. citizens in the Canal Zone of causing the current crisis in Panama. The fact is, they did not cause it.

The flag incident was an argument that involved the U. S. students and the governor of the Canal Zone. It in no way involved the Republic of Panama. The U. S. students did not care if the two flags flew at the schools; they object to no flags flying. The Panamanian press distorted the story until it appeared that the U. S. students were objecting to Panama's flag flying, and it incited the students and people of Panama to riot. The Communists then moved in and made certain that the mobs stayed aroused and in a hysteria.

Every concession from the U. S. to Panama has come as a direct result of rioting and causing damage to U. S. property. The blame for allowing the conditions for rioting to go unnoticed in Panama should be placed directly on the U. S. State Department and the CIA, not on the U. S. citizens in the Zone. It is the State Department's business to know what is going on in countries where there are U. S. interests.

I also object to statements in an article by Bernard D. Nossiter that appeared in last Sunday's Statesman. He said, "Another sore spot is the wage paid to Panamanian workers. In theory, all of the company's 13,700 employees are equal. In fact, the 3700 U. S. citizens are more equal than the others. They get a 25 per cent bonus for working in the tropics. Moreover, non-citizen's pay is docked seven per cent because Panama taxes are less than those in the United States. In other words, a U. S. citizen gets 32 per cent more than his Panamanian opposite number." First,

of all, every U. S. citizen in the world who works for our government overseas receives a certain percentage of his base pay as a hardship differential for working away from home. Why should the U. S. citizens in the Canal Zone be condemned for this? Also, Mr. Nossiter neglected to mention that the Zonians pay income tax to Uncle Sam at the same rates as we in the U. S. pay. The average per cent of the tax in the U. S. must be at least 20 per cent (if not, more). Therefore, the U. S. citizen in the Canal Zone gets only 12 per cent more than his Panamanian opposite—and he is 5000 miles from home! The base pay, in most cases, is the same for Panamanians and U. S. citizens doing the same type of work.

Mr. Nossiter mentioned that minimum pay on the canal is 70-80 cents per hour. What he did not mention is that the minimum pay in the Republic of Panama is 40 cents per hour. U. S. students who work as life guards at the swimming pools receive the grand rate of 63-69 cents per hour. They do not complain too loudly about these rates as the waiting lists for life guards are long because these are the only jobs available to U. S. students to earn extra money. All other jobs are held in reserve for Panamanians.

In closing, I would like to quote from a letter that Robert J. Fleming, governor of the Canal Zone, wrote to the U. S. employees of the Panama Canal Company.

"... I thank the employees of the Panama Canal for their

loyalty, restraint, forbearance, and dedication to duty.

"When you read the local newspapers, keep cool and remember that the items you read are calculated to stir you up and get you excited. Now you may ask about the United States press. The first batch of newspapers from the states really clobbered the Zonians. . . . It is essential that we get the true story before the American public but it takes time and we couldn't do it during the first few days.

"... I do not need to tell you that the American employee of the Panama Canal has been singled out for special attack by many individuals and much of the press and radio media. I have been telling, and most emphatically, representatives of the press and radio that the American employee was not responsible for what has happened. The current conflict springs from something bigger, more basic, than we Americans in the Canal Zone.

"... Panama Canal employees may receive more unwarranted criticism before the true facts are established and the United States public better understands the situation. . . . Again, I thank you for your loyalty and steadfastness."

The U. S. citizens in the Canal Zone are doing a job that is vital to our government and they deserve the wholehearted support of everyone in the U. S. and that of our leaders in Washington, D. C.—WENDY CORRIGAN, 7701 Ustick Road, Boise.